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DISCOURSE

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Free - Thinking:

I N A

LETTER

T O A

Clergy - Man.

With some

CONSIDERATIONS

O N

Mr. *Pycroft's* TREATISE

Upon the same Subject.

L O N D O N,

Sold by B. Berrington near *Essex-Street-End*, 1713.

Price Six-pence.

A Farmer

DISCOURSE

OF

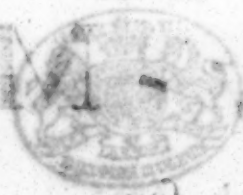
Free-Thinking

IN A

LETTER

TO A

Clergyman



With some

CONSIDERATIONS

ON

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Upon the same Subject

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Free-Thinking, &c.

S I R,

YOU were pleased to desire my Thoughts concerning the late Discourse of Free-Thinking, with relation particularly to the Effect which that Discourse may have upon Religion in general; upon the Christian Religion especially, and particularly upon the Church of *England*. By Religion in general, I suppose you mean Natural Religion, or (which is all one) Moral Virtue. And then, I humbly conceive, that the more a Man thinks of it, the better he may like it: for he cannot but see that 'tis the chief Support not only of all humane Society, but of all

individual Men. From hence it is that Parents breed up their Children, and provide for them; that one Man is assistant to another: nor is it possible that private Families, or publick Societies, should subsist without it. But so many excellent Treatises have been written upon this Subject, to demonstrate the Truth of it, as are sufficient to convince any one, (who will cast his Eyes and Thoughts upon them) that the State of Nature is a State of Peace and Friendship: that Mankind is furnished with sufficient Provision, not only for the necessary Uses, but for the Comforts of Life, if every Man will be content with his own moderate and reasonable Proportion: but otherwise, their Enjoyments will be often disturbed, and always unsecure. So that should we suppose Mankind like Mushrooms to have sprung out of the Earth, and to subsist even without any Dependance upon the Creator, and consequently without any Obligation to such a Being, yet if we will suppose them indued with the Faculties and Apprehensions which we see are common to Men, they will naturally fall into a State of Peace and Society, it being manifestly every Man's Interest to procure
and

and cultivate it: So that a State of War is no more natural to Man than a State of Madness; and from hence it may be concluded by the freest Thinker of the Age, that our Religion and our Happiness, our Duty and our Interest are really but one and the same thing consider'd under several Notions.

Nor can anything be more incredible to a Free-Thinker, than that divine Revelation should contradict the clear and unquestionable Dictates of natural Light; nor any thing more vain than to fancy that the Grace of God does release Men from the Laws of Nature. Can any Free Thinker or tolerable Thinker be ignorant how much Moral Virtue tends to the Health of our Bodies, by preventing and removing such things as are apt to obstruct it, and produce Diseases; Such as are intemperate Appetites, and violent Passions of Mind. Nay, is it not evident, that Virtue does promote and improve the Means which most effectually tend to the Improvement of Health? Such as Temperance, Contentment, Calmness, Serenity, and Cheerfulness of Mind. Is it possible, that a Free-Thinker should not be convinced that vicious Practices rob us of all things valuable? As
Safety,

Safety, Liberty, and Life it self. What else is it that brings many Men first to the Goal, and then to the Gibbet? Do these Free-Thinkers, in any of their Writings, endeavour to prove, that moral Virtue tends to spoil Mankind, by making them idle and lazy, and so bringing 'em to want the Conveniencies or Necessaries of Life, or to want a due Acquiescence of Mind in such a State as is in it self sufficient, and will appear to be such, if a Man judge according to right Reason, in which Two things the Nature of true Riches does consist? Or cannot this sort of Philosopher discern, that nothing conduceth more than Virtue to heighten our Pleasure, which is founded in a Suitableness and Congruity betwixt the Faculty and the Object? Does not Virtue prevent our Mistakes and Excesses in this Matter so far, that all our Possessions under this Regulation may deserve to be called Enjoyments? Or do these Men endeavour to persuade us, that no Honour or Reputation is to be gain'd by good Morals, but only Ignominy and Disgrace? Indeed, who can be ignorant, that Honour, as it subsists in the Person *honoured*, is nothing else but Virtue? And the Praise (which is Ho-

Honour in the Person *honouring*) is nothing else but the *Acknowledgment* of Moral Virtue? And since by the Experience of Mankind, it has been made manifest, that no sort of Persons have received more Honour from the Hearts and Consciences of Mankind, than such who have been eminent for moral Virtues; are the Free-Thinkers the only Men in the World who are ignorant hereof, and who are laying a Scheme to supplant the Interest of Virtue in the World, and promote Vice into its Place? And this Scheme must be alter'd with the best Names that either ancient or modern times have afforded. For all these Moral Men did agree, that what Health is to the Body, whereby the outward Senses are enabled to make a true Judgment of things within their proper Sphere, even that same thing is Virtue to the Mind, whereby the inward Faculties must be fitted and disposed to discern between things which differ from one another, which they who are under the Power of vicious Habits are not able to do: And also that it does exalt and regulate the Will, so that it desireth only such things as promote the Perfection of our Nature, and acquiesceth

eth in (them alone: and hereby it be-
 getteth in our Minds the truest Liber-
 ty, Ingenuity, and Generosity, which are
 inconsistent with the Servitude of Lusts
 and Passions. These Men all acknow-
 ledged, that Moral Virtue was needful to
 reduce our Passions into a due Subordi-
 nation to the superior Faculty of Rea-
 son: restraining the Violence and Impe-
 tuousness of them, from whence the great-
 est part of the Trouble and Disquiet of
 humane Life proceeds. For (say they)
 as he that is of a healthy Constitution of
 Body can endure Heat and Cold, Hun-
 ger, Thirst, and Labour, with little
 or no Prejudice to his Body; so can
 one of a good moral Disposition of
 Mind undergo various Circumstances
 of Life without receiving any Hurt
 from them. Such a one is not lift-
 ed up by Prosperity, nor dejected by
 Adversity: he is not subjected to the
 Power of Anger, Fear, Envy, or Ma-
 lice, which are the great Disturbers of
 our inward and outward Peace. And
 indeed not only these Free-Thinkers
 mention'd in the *Discourse*, but all emi-
 nent Philosophers have agreed, that in-
 ward Serenity and Composedness of
 Mind is both the natural Effect, and pro-
 per

per Reward of Moral Virtue. And you, Sir, cannot but take Notice that the holy Scripture bears Witness to this Doctrine of the Philosophers in such Expressions as these: *A good Man is satisfied from himself. In the Fear of the Lord is strong Confidence. The Righteous is bold as a Lion. Thou wilt keep him in perfect Peace, whose Mind is stayed on Thee. The Fruits of Righteousness shall be Peace, Quietness, and Assurance for ever. So likewise in the New Testament, Tribulation and Anguish shall be upon every Soul that doth Evil: but to him that doth good, Glory, and Honour, and Peace: Peace that passeth all Understanding: Joy that is unspeakable and full of Glory.*

You perhaps will ask, why all these Texts to a Clergy-Man? 'tis only with this Intent, to satisfy your second Question: That since the Free-Thinkers of old Israel, old Greece, and old Rome, who were the Ornaments of their respective Ages and Countries, and with whose great Names the Writer of the late Discourse has adorned his Book; since all these do agree

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with

Prov. 14. 14,

26.

Chap. 28. 1.

Is. 26. 3.

Chap. 32. 17.

Rom. 2. 9,

10.

Gal. 5. 22.

1 Pet. 1. 8.

with the inspired Writers of the Christian Institution, Free-thinking can import no Danger to the Christian Religion. And to this Conclusion our modern Free-Thinkers of *England* bare Joint-Testimony: for no old Philosopher has written better of Natural Religion than the Lord *Verulam*, nor any Christian Divine better in his Profession than Arch-Bishop *Tillotson*.

But I must not forget that you said in your Letter, that you were afraid that these Free-Thinkers, who have such Respect to these old Philosophers, intended to revive old Paganism. I do not perceive that these People are setters forth of any Heathen Deity. And if by old Paganism you mean Moral Virtue, that is not at all inconsistent with the Christian Religion. And therefore I wish they may go on and prosper in it; 'tis an admirable Design, and rightly formed as to Point of Time; for there is not any thing so much wanted at present in this good Country of ours, as good old Pagan Morals. As for all Speculations, Natural or Mathematical, the Age is wonderfully improved by them. Nor has any Age since that of *Augustus* been more polite. Nay, Christian Speculations have received

ed very great Improvements, its Mysteries were never brought so near to humane Comprehension as at present. And the generous Moral Principle of the Christian Religion is made plain to the Comprehension of Laymen: insomuch that even I have understood, that as by the Christian Plan, I am obliged to assist all Mankind as far as my Abilities and Opportunities will enable me, so have I a Right to demand the Assistance of all Men, as their Circumstances shall enable them to relieve me. A noble Rule, worthy of God to give, and fit for Men to receive; hereunto the old Pagan Philosophy agrees perfectly. And if our Free-Thinkers can revive the Practice of this one comprehensive Principle, you may promise Security to Religion and Property, to Church and State, and whatsoever is useful and delightful in humane Life.

But perhaps you have received some melancholy Impressions from reading Mr. *Pycroft's* late Inquiry into Free-Thinking in matters of Religion, wherein he complains against the Author of the *Rights of the Christian Church*, and some *Socinians* who join with him in exposing Mysteries, Creed-Makers, and some ancient

Fathers of the Church; and who will believe nothing but what they see Cause to believe. But I would not have you to be discouraged hereat; for supposing that some few Mens Heads shall be so turned, that they cannot believe otherwise than as they have Reason to believe, yet this will not hinder other Men, of another cast of Head, from carrying their Belief very far beyond their Reason. Few Men have so long a Line of Thought as to fathom this Proposition, *viz.* *'Tis with Believing as with Speaking, a Man should have a Reason to speak; or, if he has not such, 'tis Cause sufficient for him to hold his Tongue: so a Man should have a Reason to believe a Proposition: but if he have not so, that is Cause enough for him not to believe it.* Besides, if some Socinians will make it their Business to explain the Mysteries of holy Scripture, and endeavour to bring them down to the Level of a mean Capacity, you have your Liberty either to laugh at, or pity them for their Labour in vain. For that the Christian Religion will ever be mysterious, and every Christian Church will retain those Mysteries in their Creeds and publick Confessions.

And

And as for the Fathers, since 'tis not the revealed Will of God, that we should believe in them, 'tis no great matter if some Disputes have arisen either about the Authority, or about the Meaning of their Writings; and methinks Mr. *Pycroft* shewed more Zeal than Prudence in reviving a Controversie, which, for some Time, had been laid asleep: I mean, the *Socinian* Controversie, which can never be brought to an End by writing, because one Party will not be satisfied by Authority, nor the other by Reason, which cannot comprehend Mystery. And truly 'tis a hard matter to say, whether Authority should submit to Reason, or Reason to Authority; however, 'tis certain, that the common Mass of Christians will hold fast to their Catechisms and their Creeds, and think that doubting of nothing is the same with believing all things. And were it not for a certain Consideration which prevails sometimes over me, I could willingly go along with the Stream, as the safest way to dispose of my self: having long since heard a spiritual Divine preach upon the Text wherein our Saviour is said to have rode upon an Ass to *Jerusalem*. This Divine set forth, that *Jerusalem* was
a Type

a Type of Heaven, and that *Jesus Christ* was the Head mystically united to all Christian People, who make up his mystical Body. And from all these things put together, he inferr'd this Doctrine, that the safest way of going to Heaven is upon an Ass. And now could I be sure of a good-natured tame Ass to carry me along, I should be contented; but since the Pope lays so high a Claim to support all Christians in this their Journey, and more especially to us of this Island, I fear least he should play us a skittish Trick; and, out of some Pique, should toss us off his Back into Purgatory. But I am gone too far from my Point; for all I intended to say in this Point was, that tho' some few Men did question the Mysteries of Religion, of whom Mr. *Pycroft* complains, yet the Majority were far from free-thinking; and therefore can give the Clergy no Trouble from their Speculations: To which I may add, that even those Free-Thinkers, of whom Mr. *Pycroft* complains, are so unwilling to submit to Authority, without good Reason, that no People are more averse to Popery than they. And consequently they are a good Bulwark in Defence of the Constitution
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of our Church, against the Attacks of the Church of *Rome*: but perhaps you may not think them sufficiently submitted to the Authority of the Church of *England*, as by Law establish'd. But I assure you, Sir, I never heard of any Free-Thinker, who was a Presbyterian, or who was led by his Conscience into any schismatical Separation from the Church; but as far as I could ever perceive, they go to Church as often as the Law requires them. But perhaps you will say, that they shew no great Zeal for the Church. And 'tis so much the better say I, for then they can bring no Scandal upon the Church. For there are such weak Brethren in the Church, as would think the worse of it if this sort of Men were zealous for it, and, of consequence, much caressed by it. It had been well if the Clergy themselves had been heretofore but moderately zealous for the Church. For what did the Church get by the Zeal of Arch-Bishop *Laud*, the *Sacheverell* of the last Age? And I doubt that when the Church's Account comes to be cast up, she will be no Gainer by the zealous Labours of Dr. *Sacheverell*, the eminent *Laudean* of this Age. Nor do I see any Reason to
be-

believe, that in the next Age, the *Lat-
dean* Faction will be own'd for the only
Church-Men, which at present is a Title
they appropriate to themselves. Not that I
think that the Church of *England* will
fall to the Ground, either in the next or
any succeeding Age whatsoever; but a
Time may yet come, when an honest
Man, who frequents her Ordinances, may
be accounted a good Church-Man, tho' he
should live in Peace and Charity with
all Men, and damn neither the *Dutch*,
nor the Dissenters.

Such as this, dear Doctor, is your Mo-
deration; for tho' I know you to be an
entire Conformist to the Doctrine and
Discipline of the Church of *England*, yet
I know you are not asham'd to be styled
a moderate Man. I have heard you say,
that *formerly the Papists thought it their In-
terest to divide us, in hopes of making us a
Prey to them: but now they may save themselves
the Labour, since we are ready to cut one ano-
ther's Throats for the Church: and our only
Happiness is, that the Papists are not at present
(as you were willing to hope) in a Con-
dition to find their Account in our Divisions.*
'Tis too true, that some of these Divi-
sions have been carried on by Means of
some hot-headed, self-interested Clergy-
Men,

Men, who found their Account heretofore in complimenting the Crown with the Liberties of the People, and 'tis only this sort of Clergy which some Free-Thinkers have of late written against. All the sharp and severe Expressions in the *Rights of the Christian Church*, &c. are only levell'd against Dr. Hicks, Mr. Les'y, and such like, who would set up an Independency in the Clergy, and divest the Crown of its Supremacy. But there is not the least Reason to suppose that you, or any other sober Clergy-Man, who is a Lover of his Country, and the *English* Constitution in Church and State, is reflected upon by any Expression in that or any other Free-Thinker's Book. History sets forth, that there have been Clergymen in several Ages of the Church, who have given great Offence by their Pride and intemperate Zeal. But how this can affect you, or any honest sober Church-Man, either in this, or any former Age of the Church, is what I cannot comprehend. 'Tis, I doubt, too true, that the Number of the best Church-Men is the smallest Number. But then you know that *Elijah* was left alone when the *Prophets of Baal* were Four Hundred and

1 Kings 18.
22.

Fifty Men. But God be praised, the Number of our Clergy, who have not bowed the Knee to the Idol of *Passive Obedience, to a Tyrant*, is not contemptible. Nor do they want the Encouragement of the Chiefs of their Order, eminent for their great Learning and Integrity.

Such Men who have not sacrificed either Knowledge or Charity to ungovern'd Zeal. And, I hope, the Number of these Men will increase, for the Preservation, Peace, and Prosperity of the Church of *England*. Of which Church, I dare, with Boldness affirm, that whilst her Guides are adorn'd with a peaceable Spirit towards all Men, and a paternal Regard to the whole Body of the People, to whom they are become Fathers and Inspectors, they will never be disturbed, in the Execution of their Charge, by any Free-Thinkers, or by any other than hot-headed, thoughtless Men: Such as, by their unwary and foolish Behaviour, have brought a Suspicion on the Clergy, as if they were not well affected to the publick Weale. 'Twere these Boutefoux, great in Noise, tho' few in Number, who oppos'd the Exclusion of the Duke of *York*, when it was evidently visible to the whole Land, that a Wolf
may

may be intruded with Sheep, as well as a Papist with Protestants. And when this Duke, having attain'd the Regal Power, answer'd the melancholy Expectation of all sensible Men, by bearing down the Laws of his Country, and setting up Popery (as in Conscience he was bound to do, under Pain of eternal Damnation): insomuch as at last he was excluded, and the Prince of *Orange*, our glorious Deliverer, settled in his stead; yet there were still some of this inconsiderate Crew, who contended for his Right to the Crown, against the Settlement made by Parliament, and suffer'd Martyrdom, (in this scandalous Cause) not in Life, but Livings. And tho' one would think that Time should have allay'd this occasional Heat in the Clergy, yet a late Experience has shewn how far one Clergyman of the *Laudian* Faction could work up the People of *England* to address for a supposed *Hereditary* Right, in opposition to the Protestant Succession by Law established. Could any Man have thought at the Time of King *William's* Coronation, that in 20 or 30 Years from thence to come, any one Priest should have taken upon him to declaim against the Revolution

in the chief Church of the Metropolis of *England*, to the chief Magistrates of that great City: And should have been able to raise a Mob to defend himself against an Impeachment of the Commons of *Great Britain*, and to escape with Favour. Now I speak of this matter, Sir, only to put you in Mind, that 'tis only this *Sacheverellian* Temper of some few Clergymen, which raises Speculations in thinking Men, and sometimes causeth Expressions, which ought not to drop from the Pens of Free-Thinkers; but Allowances must be made for Failings in all Men, *high and low, one with another.*

But to be yet more particular in answer to your Third Question, whether any Danger was likely to arise to the Church of *England* from Free-Thinkers: I say, no: 'Tis impossible that any sort of Danger can arise from them; but, on the contrary, all the Security of the Church of *England*, under God and the Queen, depends on the Free-thinking of the People of *Great Britain*. By free-thinking, I do not mean very nice and curious Speculations, received and digested well in the Mind, few People being capable of such Thoughts; But I mean such sober and useful thinking as is of continual Use to Mankind
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in the common Occurrences of Life. I would explain my self to you hereupon by a Notion of *Father Malbranch*, a late *Cartesian* Writer, who has asserted very well the Doctrine of his Master *Des Cartes*, that our Senses were given us by God only to preserve our Bodies from Harm; but not to be employ'd in curious, nice, and needless Speculations: and therefore, says he, 'tis no Wonder if our Senses, nicely misapply'd, should be mistaken about their proper Objects: Such as Bodies are generally esteem'd to be. In like manner our reasoning Faculty was, as I conceive, given us by God, to preserve our selves from Danger, by its useful Application: but not to be employ'd in curious and needless Speculations. Now as to all useful Application of Mind to preserve our selves, either as a Church, or a State, from Danger, I look upon the Body of the common People of *Great Britain* to have their Share in Free-thinking; and thereby they will preserve the Church and State too from Danger. All sorts of People saw the Danger of the Church in King *James's* Reign, and joined together to rescue it from the Danger. And notwithstanding our subtle Faction, who are Enemies to free-thinking,

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ing, have shewed their subtle Opposition to Revolution-Principles, and are still endeavouring to distinguish them away, together with the Oaths they have sworn according to those Principles, yet the Body of the common People, when they shall get out of the Fear into which they were lately misled, will return to their usual Habit of Free-thinking. They will be able to distinguish between a Popish and a Protestant Successor.

They will distinguish between a Usurper and a rightful Prince, by the same Characters by which our Saviour *Jesus Christ* set forth the Difference between the Thief and the Shepherd :

John 10. 1, 2. *Verily, I say unto you, he that enters not by the Door into the Sheepfold, but climbeth some other way, is a Thief and a Robber : but he, who enters in by the Door, the same is the Shepherd of the Sheep.* The Door through which rightful Princes, who are the Shepherds of their People, enter, is the free and publick Consent of those Nations whose Government they take upon them : whilst Falsehood, Fraud, and Force introduce a Usurper. In like manner the common People had too much free Thought in the last Century, as to distinguish between a Tyrant

Tyrant and a King, as between a Wolf and a Shepherd: In as much as the one preserveth, the other preys upon the Flock. And they have so much free Thought left 'em at present, as to distinguish between Impenitency and Innocence: and to know that a Doctor may be in the wrong Box, when, with the greatest Confidence, he banters down the Government to which he has sworn himself a faithful Subject. Such as these were, and will be, the free Thoughts of the common People of *England*, when they are free from the Surprizes of subtle Machinations. And hereby does the Safety of the Church of *England*, under God and her gracious Majesty, subsist.

But as for Men of great Parts and Abilities, such as he is suppos'd by his own Party to be, who wrote the Discourse upon Free-Thinking: to whom your Question, as I suppose, chiefly relates, I return you this Answer, that the Church of *England* cannot possibly be in any Danger from them. To satisfy you herein, I desire you to keep in your Mind the Distinction between moderate Free-Thinkers and accurate Free-Thinkers; because if at any Time you should be surprized with Fear from these latter sort,
you

you may be comforted with the vast Overballance of the former sort of moderate Free-Thinkers, such, are the Body of the common People, who can think well enough to serve their own Turn, and the Church's Turn too: And even then when on a sudden they were spirited up by the Doctor in all their Tumults, they only express'd an honest Design to have preserved the Church of *England*, had it been in any Danger, as they were then made believe that it was. And as they then aimed only at the good End, so when the Doctor has given over chusing of P-----ts, the same People may be so free as to think, that an outrageous Fury against the Protestant Dissenters is not so good a mean to preserve the Church as is Christian Charity and Moderation. They may come to think, that 'tis no Sin for Protestants to suffer one another to be sincere in the Worship of God, and this is all that is meant by Toleration. Nay, these moderate Free-Thinkers may come to be of an Opinion, that Toleration may be more for the Honour of the Church, than Persecution ever was; and that it would better become the Priests of the Church, to wish that all Protestant Dissenters may go to Heaven, and endeavour

your by their good Examples to forward them in their Journey thither-ward, than to leave them *in Hell with the Devil and his Angels*. Nay, a Time may come, through the free-thinking of the Laymen, that Passive Obedience may be enacted to become due only to the Laws of the Land, and to such sovereign Princes, who make those Laws the only Measure of their Government: A Time may come, when mere Speculations, and holding the right Side of a Question, may not be thought the only necessary Means of Salvation; but that the Love of God, and of our Brother, may be thought necessary also. Honest Doctor, never fear moderate Lay-Free-Thinkers; 'twere such who assisted the Reformation from Popery, and will always endeavour to prevent its Return.

But as for Men of great Parts and Abilities, such as the Author of the late Discourse of Free-Thinking is suppos'd to be, I say, that the Church cannot be in any Danger from such Men, supposing them to be accurate in ever so high a degree. For *First*, such Men are endued with so much Knowledge as must of Necessity take from them all those foolish Scruples of Conscience which vex

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and torment the Minds of ignorant People, and which have ever been the only Reasons upon which the Dissenters have grounded their Separation from the Worship and Discipline of our Church. And indeed I never heard of any of this sort of Men, or of any sort of learned Men whatsoever, who did not conform to our Church, if *English* Protestants; or who did not approve of Conformity thereunto, if they were Foreign Protestants. 'Tis impossible, that a Free-Thinker should run himself into any Danger to disturb the Peace of any Protestant Church whatsoever. Perhaps you may object with Mr. *Pycroft*, that he who wrote the *Rights of the Christian Church*, &c. does in that Book vent many hard Expressions against the Church. But yet that Author, in the Preface to that Book, has given a very true and just Account of the Constitution of our Church, insomuch that they who have wrote against his Book, find no Fault with his Preface, and many of the Clergy themselves commend it. And therefore it is apparent, that all his severe Expressions are design'd against those Clergy, whose Doctrines and Practices are a Dishonour to the Church of *England*,

gland, as he has set it forth in his Preface: And not only a Dishonour to it, but directly tending to its utter Ruine and Subversion. Now suppose that the Author of the *Rights*, &c. should be mistaken in his Judgment, and that Dr. Hicks, Mr. Lessly, Dr. Sacheverell, and such like Clergymens Popish and Jacobite Doctrines and Practices, do not at all tend to subvert the Church of *England*, yet I have no Reason to condemn that Writer as an Enemy to the Church, since he shews his Enmity only against such whom he takes to be the Church's Enemies. The like may be said of all other free-thinking Writers, who never shew their Resentment against any Clergymen for their Conformity to the Church of *England*, but only because they promote such Principles which these Gentlemen take to be subversive of the Church: chiefly because they vilifie and disgrace that happy Revolution by which the Church of *England* was preserved, and the Protestant Succession settled, which, I hope, will always preserve it, under the Blessing of God. And now, I hope, I have satisfied you, that neither moderate nor accurate Free-Thinkers are Enemies to the Church of *England*.

But if this will not fully satisfy your Doubt; but that you are willing to inquire what Danger may ensue, supposing these Men to be Enemies to the Church: I will join with you in that impossible Supposition: I mean, morally impossible; because I would give you an over-measure of Satisfaction upon this Point. Wherefore I say, that upon this Supposition, 'tis impossible that the Church should be in any Danger from them, by reason of the inconsiderate Number of this sort of Men.

*Numero vix sunt totidem quot
Tubarum porta, vel divitis ostia Nili. Juv.*

It has pleas'd God to give to the People of *England* sufficient Understanding, by which they are able to support their own Beings, breed up, and provide for their Children, and take some Care for Posterity. And 'tis the Use of their Free-thinking alone, that fits them for the constant Discharge of these necessary Offices. But yet if they who are conscious of their own Abilities to discharge these common Functions by the Use of right Reason should attempt, by the same Means, to become accurate Free-Thinkers

Thinkers upon the most nice and uncommon Subjects, they would find themselves engag'd in Matters too hard for them to overcome. They will find that their Share of humane Reason was not given them for curious Speculations, but for common Use; 'twas no more given them to make them accurate Free-Thinkers, than to make them good Painters, or good Poets. And I believe that you will be in the right, if you conclude, that there are no more curious Free-Thinkers in *England*, than there are Poets or Painters. For my Part, I do not believe that there are, in this Nation, so many as Seven of either sort. I do not believe that there are Six Men in *England* of equal Brightness of Parts, Breadth of Learning, and Depth of Judgment, as one who deserves the Name of a Free-Thinker ought to be, there being so many Qualifications necessary to a Free-Thinker as very rarely can meet together in one Man. As 1st, He should be of Ability sufficient to recal every Opinion which he had received in his Education, to impartial Examination. This is a Task fit only for a great Genius; but the common Case of Mankind is this:

By Education only we are led,
 We so believe, because we so were bred.
 The Priest continues what the Nurse began;
 And thus the Child imposes on the Man.

And does it not look like a Difficulty insuperable impartially to examine all the Opinions we have receiv'd in our tender Understandings, and which have been confirmed by long Custom, as well as receiv'd also by our Elders and Betters, and pass'd as unquestionable for several Ages. No Interest or Inclination must be capable to byass the Judgment of such a Free-Thinker. Now, how many Men thus qualified, may we expect to find in *England*? My Opinion is, not above Seven among Seven Millions of People, which is commonly suppos'd to be the *Quota* of *England*: But if you will suppose it probable, that there may be one such Man in a Hundred Thousand, then there will be but 70 accurate Free-Thinkers in *England*. And suppose all these were Enemies to the Church, which is very unlikely, yet what Harm can the Church sustain from one in a Hundred Thousand? But I can no more suppose that there are 70 such Men in *England*,
 than

than that there are 70 good Poets or Painters. But you will say, one Man will infect many; and if the Number of Free-Thinkers should increase, the Mysteries of our Religion would be set at nought, as Mr. *Pycroft* has shewn from some of their Writings. And in this Point of Mystery their Enmity to Religion does chiefly consist. But yet if it be necessary to my Salvation, that I believe in Mysteries, the Priests ought to give me Leave to think upon them in order to my Belief of them, unless that believing be no sort of thinking: which probably may be the Case in some Mens View. For suppose that you should ask me, if I believe the Mystery of the holy Trinity: I answer, yes. You ask me what do I believe concerning it: I answer, that I believe nothing of it, because I understand nothing of it, but only that it is a Mystery. And with this Answer you are satisfied. From whence it may appear to some, that believing of Mysteries is not thinking, or making use of our Understandings, but only pronouncing the Phraseology of Trinity and Mystery as often as we are required so to do. And as long as this will pass for Orthodoxy, I can perceive no Occasion for Free-thinking, nor any

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Danger from it: especially when I consider, that in old *Israel*, old *Greece*, and old *Rome*, the Author of the Letter of Free-thinking has not number'd above Twenty Men, whom he supposes to have had a nice Freedom of Thought. And in old *England*, he has reckon'd no more than Three such Men, *Bacon*, *Hobbs*, and *Tillotson*, as Men of Eminency: so that when I have computed Seven, I have reckon'd the utmost Number. For to return to my former Comparison, where will you find 5 curious Painters to add to Sir *Godfrey Neller*, and Mr. *Closterman*? Nay, you must find out Seven; for these Two are Foreigners. And where will you find Six Epic Poets to join with Sir *Richard Blackmore*? It may also be consider'd, that to think accurately upon the Subjects of greatest Importance, such as Religion and natural Philosophy, so as thereby to come to the true Knowledge of God, and our selves, is a matter of nicer Concern than either Poetry or Painting, or both those curious Arts joined together. And therefore from what I have said, I hope I may conclude, that Seven accurate Free-Thinkers are as many as may well be suppos'd to subsist together amongst Seven Millions of

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English People; but if you will still make the worst that can be imagin'd of the Matter, and will suppose a Free-Thinker to be a speculative Atheist; even then 'twill be hard to suppose, that there are Seven Men in *England*, who have satisfied themselves as to the Point of speculative Atheism: this being a self-evident Proposition, *Something was from ever, else nothing ever could have been*. Now should these Seven Men be willing to exercise their Spleen against the Church of *England*, which is but a bare Possibility, what Danger could arise from thence to a Church which is in great Esteem with the Bulk of Seven Millions of *English* People?

Consider, Sir, how many things must concur to qualifie a Man for Freedom of Thought. As *First*, natural Courage in a high Degree is absolutely necessary; how few are to be found who dare examine into some Subjects; or so much as doubt of some Propositions which have obtained general Reputation, especially when they are stamped with the Authority of the Priesthood? Besides, a natural Easiness of Thought, and Freedom from all Heat and Passion, and from the Government of private Interest, or particular Inclination, is necessary to Freedom of Thought: A Man had need be free

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from Pride too, which will incline a Man to overvalue his own Thoughts. A self-conceited Man will never think indifferently; and he who favours any ill Inclination or sinister Ends, can never think without a Bias. Besides this too, it requires good Learning as well as good Parts to fathom the Depth of some Subjects, and to discern even the Shallow-ness of some others, which are vulgarly thought to be of great Moment, when they are of little or no Concern to Mankind in general; and who is sufficient for these things? Certainly the Number of this sort of Men must be so small, as not to deserve the Concern of the Clergy of the Church of *England*.

Your last Demand in your Letter to me was, what I thought of the Performance of the Writer, in his Discourse of Free-thinking; and what I thought would be the best Deportment of the Clergy towards that Discourse. I will tell you the History of my Thoughts as they fell out in fact. I was very well pleas'd while I was reading that Discourse, as if I had found out some extraordinary *Discovery* in it: and really it made me believe, that I was gaining some Degree of Knowledge from it, which I wanted. And if, whilst I was reading it over, any one should have

have ask'd me, how I lik'd it? I verily believe, I should have given it no small Commendation. But after I had read it, I began to make Reflexions upon it, and, as my Custom is in such Cases, to ask my self what I had learned by reading this Book? And my Answer was, just nothing at all; 'tis a silly Book, says I to my self, tho' it may be written by a learned Man; for it only proves a self-evident Proposition, *viz.* that a Man ought to have Liberty to think upon any matter that concerns him. Who would be such a Sot as to contend for the other Side of the Question? Will any *Gothamite* say, that 'tis not lawful, or so much as convenient, for a Man to think freely of his own Concerns, but especially upon those matters which concern him most of all. Wherefore all I can say of the Book is, that as it can do no Good, so it can do no Harm.

But as to your last Point, what Behaviour the Clergy should shew towards the Book, 'twould be too great a Confidence in me to pretend to teach my Teachers; only a Fool may sometime put forth a Word in Season; and as I have thought, 'twould be best that no Notice should be taken of this Book by the Clergy; for 'twas the Notice which was not long since taken of a Discourse, which, when it came out

first, was generally thought but a very ordinary Performance, which, in a short time, gain'd an extraordinary Credit both with the Mob of the Clergy and Laity too. And 'twould be now a wild Extravagance in the Clergy to preach or write against this Discourse; for the Author of it, who has set forth King *Solomon* and the Prophets, for Old-Testament Free-Thinkers, would doubtless hold forth *Jesus Christ* and his Apostles for Free-Thinkers of the New-Testament. He will urge, that our Saviour found Fault with the Scribes and Pharisees, who were the Clergy of the Church of *Israel*, for their Bigottry and intemperate Zeal for their Forms and Ceremonies. He also exhorted them to search the Scriptures, and to think freely of the Doctrines which he gave out to them. He, 'tis likely, will say, that the *Bereans* were commended, because they thought freely of the Apostles Doctrines, and compared them with the Scriptures which they had then in their Hands. He will tell you, that *St. Paul*, the great Apostle of the Gentiles, declared for Free-thinking, when he declared in his own, and in the Names of the rest of the Apostles, that they *had no Dominion over the Faith of Christians, but only were Fellow-Helpers of their Joy.* Not for that

2 Cor. 1. 24.

we have Dominion over your Faith: but we are Helpers of your Joy. Wherefore I would not that you should write against this Book; for that way will only spread it farther, and make it read the more. Nay, if I were worthy to advise, the Clergy should not speak against it, because even that can hardly be done without bringing themselves under Suspicion of exalting the old Clergy-Power over the Laity: who in that Case will be apt to ask them, why their Predecessors were such Fools, as to withdraw from the Protection of the infallible Man at *Rome*? Had the Clergy stuck to him, they might, with a good Grace, have assured the Laity, that they had no need to think for themselves in matters of Religion; since there was an infallible Free-Thinker at *Rome*, who had thought for them, to save both them and their Posterity the Labour of thinking for themselves for ever. Nay, if the Clergy should be violent against this Book, some peevish People would be induced to suspect as if they were meditating a Return to the old Cixy Croxy of *Rome* again. Therefore I think 'twould be best to take little Notice of the Book; but if any one mentions it to you, you may say that there is little or nothing in it but what every Body knows; especially there is no Church of

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England-Man but knows, that 'tis the Principle and Practice of his Church to perswade all Christian People to search the Scriptures, and to examine the Doctrines of our Church by those holy Oracles ; for we have cast off the pretended infallible Guide long since, and have translated the Bible into *English*, that the common People may meditate upon it : so that there is no Church built upon Free-thinking more than ours is. You may freely own, that you are sorry that any of the Clergy have behaved themselves so ill as to have drawn the Suspicion of some few Free-thinking Laymen upon them, as if they intended an Independency upon the supreme Civil Power ; but since our Saviour had a Traytor amongst his Twelve, 'tis not strange, that amongst 30000 Clergy, as are computed in *England*, there should be 3 or 4, who should be haughty and high-minded. Besides, you may tell the Laity, that if they are pleased to keep the Power in their own Hands, the Clergy can never wrest it out of them ; but if they will free them from the Civil Power, they are but Men : And such a Temptation may prevail upon them, at one time or other, to accept of more Power than belongs to them.

However, dear Sir, let me advise you as
a Friend,

a Friend, never to oppose the Principle of Free-thinking ; because 'tis upon that Principle our Reformation from Popery was founded ; but rather take part with Free-thinking : Say, that Education is nothing else but the Authority of our Teachers over us, when we were most credulous and weakest in Judgment : Say, that Universality is only a quainter Name to signify the Multitude, which is the weakest part of humane Authority : Say, that universal Consent is not a sufficient Reason whereon to ground our Belief ; for all the World, except the *Jews*, agreed in Idolatry, and sometimes the *Jews* also agreed with them. Nay, you may lament, that in Countries where Priests bare sway, Heterodoxies, or unfashionable Opinions, are had in greater Detestation than moral Practices ; it being agreed by the Divines of both Churches, that *Galileo* had not been brought into the Inquisition, if, instead of following *Copernicus*, he had followed a Whore. In sum, dear Sir, I would have you to advise the Clergy of your Acquaintance of what I now write to you ; for my only Fear is this, that if the Clergy should take a Fancy to preach against Free-thinking as zealously as they have preached for Passive-Obedience, the Laity will, in a short time, be as fond of Free-thinking, as they are averse to Arbitrary Power. But

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But to conclude seriously, I would ask the Writer of the Discourse upon Free-thinking, if the Argument he draws for it from the many Disputes which the Clergy have made in matters of Religion, considering also how few People have a Capacity for accurate Free-thinking, does not infer the contrary Conclusion to what he pretends to prove by it, *viz.* that Men should abstain from Free-thinking upon matters of religious Importance: Or, in other Words, I would ask him, if he himself does not esteem that Man to be happier than a Free-thinker of common Capacity, who trusts to his Catechism, holds to his Creed, and is carried along in the Current of the fashionable Religion of his Country: supposing that doubting of nothing is the same thing with believing all things. And having this Opinion settled in the Habit of his Mind, (tho' perhaps never call'd up into actual thought) *viz.* 'Tis impossible that the Queen, and Parliament, and Convocation, and Bishops, and Clergy, and all should be mistaken. Let the Author of the Discourse answer this Question to his own Conscience. For my part, I dare lay him a Wager, that the Body of the People of Great Britain are capable of no freer Thoughts than these. I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours, &c.

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